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ABSTRACT

As early childhood programs face the challenges of becoming more comprehensive, better coordinated with other service providers in the community, and better attuned to the importance of consistency of care between home and child care, the demand to integrate early childhood education and child care with family support is growing. This report discusses the background, conceptual framework, and practices of family support programs that are successful in integrating practice into early childhood education and child care settings. Section 1 describes the separate histories of the child care and family support movements. Section 2 provides a conceptual framework for integrating family support principles and practices into early childhood education and child care settings. Section 3 discusses a set of principles derived from practices of successful family support programs, including: (1) an ecological approach to promoting child and adult development; (2) a preventive rather than remedial orientation; (3) a focus on families' strengths rather than their weaknesses; (4) a sensitivity to local needs and resources; (5) a recognition that all families need information and social supports; and (6) a commitment to empower individuals and families with the goal of self-sufficiency. Sections on integrating practices with principles and a typology for integrating family support principles and practices are followed by four examples of family support in early education and child care settings. Contains 23 references. (DR)

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# FAMILY SUPPORT IN EARLY EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE SETTINGS: MAKING THE CASE FOR BOTH PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

by

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## Introduction

Significant increases in the numbers of mothers in the work force who have children younger than six, and growing recognition over the last two decades of the long-term benefits of quality preschool education, have resulted in the majority of young children in the United States being cared for by someone other than their parents for part of each day (Willer et al., 1991; Berrueta-Clement et al., 1984). There are multiple and sometimes competing motivations for families' reliance on non-parental child care, such as parental employment, preparing children for school, promoting children's social skills, and protecting children from maltreatment. Yet, even while many of these motivations for non-parental child care reflect parents' needs, the early education and child care fields tend to be child-focused rather than family-focused.

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While early education and child care settings are logical places to reach parents and other family members, ironically, until quite recently, few have structured their programs around family support principles and offered family support activities to meet families' needs (Galinsky and Weissbourd, 1994). Today, however, professional demand for the integration of early childhood and family support services is growing rapidly. For example, the National Association for the Education of Young Children is increasingly defining quality services as including staff capacity to work effectively with parents on behalf of children (Powell, 1989).

By design, child care is a service framed around parents and families' needs. Yet, many child care and early education staff need better ideas and strategies for how to deal with, and successfully help, multiply-stressed families. This article provides a conceptual framework for the integration of early education and child care services with family support; a typology for the inclusion of family support principles and practices in various types of settings, and examples of the design and implementation of family support services in different types of early education and child care settings.

**The separate histories of child care and family support**

Until quite recently, separate systems of early childhood education and child care services were perpetuated through policy mandates, funding streams, regulations, training requirements, and public demands based primarily on family income and mother's employment status. This situation has changed somewhat in the last few years with more

attention being devoted to integrated efforts in standard-setting, training, technical assistance, and public education encompassing a variety of early childhood program settings.

Alongside these changes in early education and child care, the family support movement has been growing, and, over time, defining its place in the larger human service and education fields. This growth has been well chronicled and analyzed by the Harvard Family Research Project (Harvard Family Research Project, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1994, 1993a, 1993b, 1992a, 1992b, 1990, 1989a, and 1989b). Often, what began as a small number of "grass-roots" parent education and informational and social support initiatives evolved into larger systems of family support services with home visiting, group meetings, and comprehensive center-based programs. Though family support programs are diverse, fundamentally they are prevention-oriented, seeking to "strengthen the home environment through direct work with parents on child development and parenting activities..." (Weiss, 1994). Increasingly, they also assist parents with their own development through adult education classes or career counseling (Weiss, 1994; Zigler and Weiss, 1985).

Whereas historically the emphasis in child care has been on the child but not the entire family, the emphasis in family support has more often been on the entire family rather than the individual young child. Still, the family support movement has been unclear about whether it is a separate field with distinct programs, standards, and preparation requirements or whether its is a process, a way of delivering services, that can be applied to a number of fields including health, education, community development, and social services. Here, we take more of the latter position, arguing that early education and child care settings can be

enriched by application of family support principles and integration of services that reflect those beliefs.

**A conceptual framework**

Our conceptual framework for integrating family support principles and practices into early childhood education and child care settings is shaped by several key parameters:

- that early education, child care, and family support share multiple interrelated goals that are child-, parent -, family-, and community- focused;
- that these goals, while competing with each other, do not have to be conflicting; rather, they should be viewed as complementary; and
- that variations are desired and expected in the ways these goals are translated into specific strategies and activities appropriate for different service contexts.

These parameters expand the focus of the early childhood service field from "child" to "child and family." Indeed, Galinsky and Weissbourd (1994) have described this important historic shift occurring in child care in which child care centers are essentially becoming community centers offering an array of services on site and linking families to other needed community services. Put another way, some child care settings are beginning to offer services for parents and families previously found more often in family support programs.

There are practical reasons for this shift in emphasis from child-centered to family-centered services. Current family demographics, for example, convincingly show that the

education and care of most young children in the United States will increasingly be the joint responsibilities of their parents and other, often unrelated, adults in a variety of environmental settings. These settings include the children's own homes, relatives' homes, family child care homes, child care centers, Head Start programs, preschools, and the public schools. These early education and child care arrangements, alone and in combination, vary depending on parents' needs and resources, the availability of resources in the community, and children's ages. Research evidence is clear on the importance of the quality of all these arrangements, as indicated by adults' responsivity and sensitivity to children, and characteristics of the physical environment which promote children's health, safety, and cognitive and social development (Whitebook et al., 1990; Galinsky et al., 1994).

The arguments for working with families in child care settings are based on the "anticipated effects" (Powell, 1989) of doing so -- such as the research which suggests that children's competence is enhanced when adults in their lives "agree on and are consistent about the way they deal with children" (Powell, 1989). Family support can provide coherence and consistency across various early education and care settings for both children and parents, promoting common principles and practices, and thus quality at the "macro" level. Family support principles and specific family support activities and strategies -- including, but not limited to, parent education and parent involvement -- can be implemented in all types of early education and child care settings. However, the ways and extent to which these principles and practices can be implemented varies considerably by economic, social, and political supports and barriers specific to every setting.

**Learning the principles of family support**

Both family support principles and practices must be enhanced to affect the quality of early education and child care services. Yet, to date, considerably more professional attention and fiscal resources have been devoted to service design and explication rather than to understanding and assuming a set of principles that sustain good family support programs. Initiating family support services without thoughtful commitment to these principles will have only limited effects. This often occurs because many service providers quickly translate family support into programmatic terms of parent education and parent involvement -- activities about which they are more familiar and confident -- without first grasping the theory behind the practice. Without a more intentional regard for the principles of family support, family support operations (including Board, staff, and consumer attitudes; and style of service delivery) will not be substantially improved.

Core principles acknowledged as central to the family support movement (Cochran, 1987; Weiss, 1994; Weissbourd, 1991) need to be foremost in the minds of service administrators and policy makers. While various authors have used slightly different language to delineate these principles, they all stress:

- an ecological approach promoting child and adult development by enhancing both the family's child rearing capacities and the community context in which the child rearing takes place;
- a preventive rather than remedial orientation;
- a focus on families' strengths rather than their weaknesses;
- a sensitivity to local needs and resources;

- a recognition that all families need information and social supports, and;
- a commitment to empowering individuals and families so that they can meet their own needs and become increasingly self-sufficient.

**Integrating practices with principles**

Practices emanating from the principles of family support cover all aspects of early childhood education and child care service delivery and not simply the direct services for parents and children. That is, staff recruitment, training, and management; parent recruitment and communication; care provider-child interactions; and parent education, parent involvement, home visiting, respite care, and recreational activities are changed to reflect family support principles. Though the types, levels, intensity, and duration of these practices may vary substantially over time, they consistently involve the provision of parent education and social support focused on children's development. Increasingly, however, family support programs are also designed to meet the needs of parents' for education, job training, and employment-related services. This trend will likely continue with proposed changes in welfare reform.

**A typology for integrating family support principles and practices**

To help build the capacity of early childhood education and child care professionals to integrate family support principles and practices, we offer a typology that accommodates the expected variability in early childhood and child care settings due to fiscal resource constraints and other barriers. This typology is organized along three dimensions: 1) type of

early childhood service setting on a continuum from the most informal to formal, relatively simple to complex; 2) desired objectives for children, parents, and community; and 3) possible activities to be offered in each setting for each objective desired.

A Typology for Integrating Family Support Principles and Practices in Early Childhood Settings

| Type of Care | Key Objectives | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Child Development | Parent Involvement | Parent Development | Community Development |
| Relative Care | Optimal basic training; drop-in centers | Consumer education; drop-in centers | Referrals at the drop-in centers, consumer education | Consumer education, drop-in centers, child care associations |
| Family Child Care | Mandatory basic training, optional advanced training, drop-in centers, home visiting | Consumer education, drop-in centers, mandatory basic training | Referrals at the drop-in centers, consumer education, provider support | Consumer education, drop-in centers, child care associations, networking among family child care homes |
| Center-Based | Mandatory basic and advanced training, specialization in family support, home visiting, drop-in centers | Consumer education, drop-in centers, mandatory basic training, parent meetings, home visits, social events, opportunities for observation and volunteering | Referrals at the drop-in centers, consumer education, provider support, on-side referrals and counseling | Consumer education, drop-in centers, child care associations, networking among family child care homes and centers, involvement in community planning and advocacy |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Head Start** | Mandatory basic and advanced training, specialization in family support, home visiting, drop-in centers, and home visits for younger siblings | Consumer education, drop-in centers, mandatory basic training, parent meetings, home visits, social events, opportunities for observation and volunteering | Referrals at the drop-in centers, consumer education, provider support, on-side referrals and counseling, on-site family literacy and Adult education | Consumer education, drop-in centers, child care associations, networking among family child care homes, centers, and Head Start sites; involvement in community planning and advocacy; leadership training for poor families |
| **Most comprehensive** | Mandatory basic and advanced training, specialization in family support, home visiting, drop-in centers, and individualized enrichment and compensatory services | Consumer education, drop-in centers, mandatory basic training, parent meetings, home visits, social events, opportunities for observation and volunteering, parent-child activities, individual counseling and support | Referrals at the drop-in centers, consumer education, provider support, on-side referrals and counseling; on-site family literacy and Adult education; continuing education, job preparation, and other needed services | Consumer education, drop-in centers, child care associations, networking among family child care homes, centers, and Head Start sites; involvement in community planning and advocacy; leadership training for poor families and on issues related to comprehensive services |

As the typology indicates, the kinds of activities proposed become more complex as the type of care arrangement does. The intensity of the activities, too, varies with the opportunities and obstacles encountered by the different early education and child care providers. Despite this variation, however, there are core activities that can be undertaken in all settings. Training, drop-in centers, and consumer education are three.

*Training*

Despite the formidable barriers that exist to ensuring quality training across all types of child care -- low staff wages, high staff turnover, and highly variable training in early childhood education -- every effort should be made to ensure that all child care providers learn the principles and practices of family support. This basic training should cover the major family support principles and their practical implications, e.g., ways of communicating with parents. Providers should be given concrete examples relevant to their own situations of the ways these principles can be interpreted in planning, recruitment, parent relations, curriculum development, adult-child interactions, and other activities. Federal block grant and state-level funds for training should cover the costs. This training should be offered to unregulated relatives and babysitters, as well as regulated providers, to assure a base level of knowledge and skills across all child care settings. Advanced training on specific topics, curricula (e.g., Parents as Teachers, HIPPY) or service approaches should be voluntary for those not working in center arrangements.

*Drop-in Centers*

Drop-in centers which offer parenting education, parent-child activities, information, and referrals to services should be another universal service. These programs could be located within child care and Head Start centers, public schools, child care resource and referral agencies, churches, hospitals or other sites. The closer the link with child care providers, the better. Funds for such activities are already available through the Block grant and more could

possibly be obtained through the Family Preservation and Family Support Act and Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

***Consumer Education***

Consumer education on family support -- like that underway in many communities on child care quality -- should be promoted. This would cover issues such as the fit between the multiple motivations for using child care and the relations between child care providers and parents. Various mechanisms for delivering this information should be tested including radio, television, and transit ads; school newsletters; fliers in doctors' offices, welfare offices, schools, and child care centers. Ideally, these mechanisms should include opportunities for interpersonal interaction where parents and providers can receive referrals and information over the phone or in person. Child care resource and referral agencies are an important component of this consumer education, and should encourage family support activities in the child care settings they promote.

Beyond these three core services, additional family support activities should be undertaken to meet the specific needs of the children, parents, and providers in the child care setting and the larger community. They can include a variety of parent education and parent involvement groups, individual counseling and support, planned opportunities for parent-child interactions, respite child care, and recreational and social events. Careful attention should be directed to the type, intensity, and duration of these activities. Needs assessments and other planning related to the family support activities should involve child care staff and

parent representatives from the onset. This is one way to assure that the principles of family support are appropriately incorporated.

**Examples of family support in early education and child care settings**

Good examples of the integration of family support principles and practices in early education and child care settings are increasing rapidly. Several are described in the remainder of this article to illustrate what is possible and the comprehensiveness of such initiatives. These examples range from single center initiatives to national programs in a number of different types of child care settings. In each case, staff recognized that new services were needed and that these had to be delivered differently. The roles of care providers, teachers, center directors, board members, and parents have changed quite dramatically with the integration of family support and child care services. Teachers and staff are assuming more facilitative and advocacy responsibilities, and working in partnership with the parents on behalf of the child and the family. To paraphrase Galinsky and Weissbourd (1994), they are "facilitators, resources, advocates, models, coworkers with parents, and advisers."

**SHELTERING ARMS, INC.**

**214 Baker Street, NW, Atlanta, GA 30313 Contact: Elaine Draeger**

Sheltering Arms began in 1888 by a Methodist Church sewing circle concerned with providing clothing to street children. Today, it manages 11 child care centers in Atlanta and in four suburban counties. It provides year-round care, 11 hours a day to 833 children who

range in age from six weeks to five years. More than two-thirds of the families served are single-parent and most have annual incomes below $18,000. By employing a full-time Family Support Coordinator in each center to organize parent education programs, assess families' needs, and connect families to community services, Sheltering Arms addresses the needs of both children and adults. Sheltering Arms blends resources from the United Way, the Georgia Department of Children and Family Services, parental fees, the Department of Education's Pre-Kindergarten Program, and a public-private welfare reform initiative. It stands out not only for its comprehensive approach to child care and family support, but also for its staff development and training offerings available to its staff and to staff in other child care programs as well.

Sheltering Arms provides two parent/teacher conferences a year, at least six parent meetings a year, parenting classes, and workshops around issues of life skills and family management. Families are involved in center activities (such as holiday parties) and parents serve on the Advisory Committee. Through collaboration and regular meetings with community agencies, Sheltering Arms helps parents access needed services, and helps these agencies serve parents more effectively. Sheltering Arms has been so successful in its family support component that it has a contract with the Georgia Child Care Council to provide technical assistance to their grantees across the state.

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**THE NEIGHBORHOOD CHILD CARE NETWORK, SAVE THE CHILDREN'S CHILD CARE SUPPORT CENTER, 1447 Peachtree St. N.E., Atlanta, GA 30309**

Save the Children's Neighborhood Child Care Network (NCCN) provides training, technical assistance, and other supports for family child care providers, relative care providers, child care center staff, professional child care association members, and parents in four Atlanta neighborhoods. The goal of the NCCN is to improve the quality and availability of child care for families with low incomes in these communities through strategies at the neighborhood level. Over time, the NCCN has broadened its scope to include the following services:

- intensive training and technical assistance through resource rooms and toy lending libraries housed at local churches;
- the Parent Services Project, a family support program offered through clusters of family child care homes;
- Parents First, a home-based early literacy project that facilitates parents' roles as their children's first teachers;
- after-school programs through community-based organizations such as churches;
- technical assistance to newly resettled individuals, refugees, and the formerly homeless, who wish to pursue child care as a career; and
- a book reading program staffed by volunteers reaching providers with lower incomes.

Save the Children's Child Care Support Center has been able to develop and sustain the NCCN through collaborations with a number of different community partners, and funding



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from a combination of private foundation, other philanthropic, and public sector sources. The community partners have included Head Start, Georgia State University, Fulton County, the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor, the Department of Family and Children's Services, local churches, and Boys and Girls Clubs.

The NCCN is noteworthy for its community base; its "grass-roots" leadership; its responsiveness to both providers' and parents' identified needs; its use of local resources such as churches, schools, and businesses; its ability to attract licensed and unlicensed providers; its modest cost; its ability to link providers with formal systems such as the Child and Adult Care Food Program, schools, and Head Start; and last, but perhaps most important, its ability to sustain providers' and parents' interests, camaraderie, and skill improvement over long periods.

**ADDISON COUNTY PARENT/CHILD CENTER, P.O. Box 646, Middlebury, VT 05753**

**Contacts: Susan Harding and Howard Russell**

The Addison County Parent/Child Center offers center-based child care at two centers and family support services through home visiting, school-based activities, and a service network for families with young children. The idea for the Center grew from a 1978 meeting of the Vermont State Department of Mental Health and a subsequent proposal from task force established in the County. Early funding came from the Office of Adolescent Family Life for services to teenage parents. Today support comes from 27 major sources: one third federal, one third state, and one third local.

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The Center offers an array of services that include nursing, early intervention, parent-child play groups, transitional housing, and speech therapy. Teen parents are hired to work in the Center 20 hours a week to gain both employment and parenting skills. They assume positions as classroom aides, building maintenance workers, and office management assistants. Service providers and families meet together regularly at the Center to review achievements and obstacles, and to identify service needs and resources.

**THE PARENT SERVICES PROJECT, 199 Porteous Avenue, Fairfax, CA 94930**

**Contact: Ethel Selderman**

The Parent Services Project (PSP) was started in 1980 as a model demonstration approach in four racially and culturally diverse child care centers in the San Francisco Bay area. PSP was initiated to show that family support activities building on families' strengths could become integral components of early childhood programs. PSP developed from earlier discussions of the Zellerbach Family Fund's Primary Prevention Committee. Initial financial support from the Zellerbach Family Fund and the Beryl Buck Trust Fund, now the Marin Community Foundation.

In 1988, PSP was incorporated as a separate organization to provide training and technical assistance, further develop and adapt the family support approach, and advocate for needed policies at the federal, state, and local levels. Today, the PSP approach is being implemented in more than 300 sites in 4 states. The organizations using the PSP approach serve families with diverse racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds: African-American, Caucasian, Asian, and Hispanic families; families with very low to modest incomes; and families who

are immigrants to the United States who do not speak English. These organizations include individual child care centers, preschools, Head Start centers, public schools, and family child care homes, as well as more comprehensive two-generational programs. PSP also works with child care resource and referral agencies, departments of state government, and other training and technical assistance intermediaries who work with direct service providers.

**Conclusions**

As programs face the challenges of becoming more comprehensive, better coordinated with other service providers in the community, and better attuned to the importance of consistency of care between home and child care, the demand to integrate early childhood education and child care with family support is growing. Attention must be taken to integrate both family support principles and practices in early childhood settings in order to fully realize the potential of such efforts. When implemented carefully, family support principles and practices may help parents be better parents, teachers be better teachers, and children feel more secure both at home and in child care. Examples of community and regional programs which have achieved this integration exist, and there are a growing number of national, regional, and statewide intermediaries that can provide training, technical assistance, and other forms of support to these ambitious initiatives.

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